

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Today U.S. Rep. Charlie Wilson, a Democrat from Ohio's Sixth Congressional District, and U.S. Rep. Michael Turner, a Republican from Ohio's Third Congressional District, led a bipartisan effort to secure a Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) pilot program for Ohio Veterans.

The VA plans to launch pilot programs in five communities nationwide that are designed to improve outreach to veterans by better coordinating efforts through the state government, local government, and community-based organizations.

Reps. Wilson and Turner, along with nine other members of the Ohio Congressional Delegation, sent a letter urging Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric Shinseki to select the state of Ohio as one of the five communities for the test-program.

*** A text of the letter to Secretary Shinseki follows. ***

May 28, 2010

The Honorable Eric K. Shinseki
Secretary
Department of Veterans Affairs
Washington, DC 20501

Dear Mr. Secretary:

As Members of the Ohio delegation, we urge you to consider locating one of the pilot programs detailed in the Caregivers and Veterans Omnibus Health Services Act (P.L. No: 111-163) in Ohio. This recently passed Act contained a provision for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to carry out a pilot program to improve outreach efforts. The pilot program was created to assess the feasibility and advisability of using community-based organizations and local and State government entities to improve outreach to veterans, especially those transitioning from military service.

With more than 930,000 veterans in Ohio, our State provides the geographical and cultural diversity to create a comprehensive pilot program. The state has rural locations, urban locations, significant minority populations, limited access to health care in many areas, and many areas that are not close to an active duty military installation. The listed criteria meet every targeted population outlined in the program.

In addition, Ohio contains an organized network of state programs, non-profit organizations, and veteran owned businesses that assist veterans in an array of issues. Ohio has more than 35 active veteran service organizations operating in the state, including the nation's first chapter of the Veterans of Foreign Wars located in Columbus. A pilot program in Ohio would also benefit from OhioCares, a program that is a national leader in transitional assistance for returning members of the Guard. The program is a collaboration of state and local agencies that support behavioral health of returning veterans and their families. The partnership identifies community based resources also available to veterans and their families.

As you are aware, our state has the 4th largest number of returning veterans from the current wars. In response, Ohio's education system has become a leader for serving our returning veterans. The Ohio GI Promise was created by an Executive Order issued by Governor Ted Strickland. The Executive Order granted authority to the Chancellor of the Ohio Board of Regents to deem qualified veterans as Ohio residents for the purpose of qualifying for in-state tuition rates.

We respectfully ask that you choose Ohio for one of the pilot programs. The VA will have the full support of the State and local governments along with the citizens and organizations in Ohio. We believe Ohio provides the vast diversity and resources necessary to implement a pilot program that will be able to be a launching pad to implement this nationwide.

Thank you in advance for the time and attention you will give this matter.